

**Remarks of LSC Chairman Frank Strickland**  
LSC 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Good evening and welcome to all of our distinguished guests and to the committed leaders of legal services programs from across the country. The people here in this room today represent the heart and soul of the national legal services community – men and women who have dedicated their careers to making “equal justice under law” the cornerstone of our democratic system of government.

I would like to please recognize Phyllis Holmen, Steve Gottlieb and Bucky Askew from Georgia, who are my mentors in legal services.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Legal Services Corporation Board of Directors, thank you for joining us here in Washington today to share in this historic occasion celebrating LSC’s three decades of service to the poor. I want you all to know that the eleven of us who are privileged

to serve on the current Board of Directors discharge our responsibilities with a deep appreciation for the pioneers who have built the Corporation into the strong and vital force for justice it is today. All of the decisions that we make and the priorities that we set are to help you, our advocates, garner the support and resources you need to help the millions of clients who rely on your good works. We on the Board have an awesome responsibility to make sure those of you on the front lines have the tools you need to succeed. One of the most enjoyable aspects of serving on the LSC Board is the opportunity to travel around the country and meet with the dedicated advocates responsible for the day to day delivery of services to those in need. In Baltimore, Omaha, Helena, and Cincinnati, we've been extremely impressed with the innovative projects and collaborations being undertaken by LSC grantees.

If I might, I'd like to take a few moments to recognize my fellow Board members whose leadership has been critical to moving the Corporation forward in the new millennium. Lillian BeVier, a law professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, is LSC's Vice Chairman and a trusted friend and colleague. Robert Dieter runs the clinical law program at the University of Colorado in Boulder and is the chairman of LSC's Finance Committee. David Hall is a highly respected law professor and public interest leader who chairs LSC's Provisions Committee and previously served as the Provost and law dean at Northeastern University in Boston. Mike McKay is a managing partner of McKay Chadwell in Seattle and a former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington. His knowledge of the issues facing the American legal community and his pro bono background in private practice are extensive. Tom Fuentes of Lake Forest, California, is a senior fellow of the Clairmont Institute. Tom is a highly respected leader in

Orange County, where he serves as a trustee of the South Orange County Community College District. Tom is also the founder of one of the country's largest food banks serving the community's homeless. Tom Meites is a partner at Meites, Mulder, Burger & Mollica in Chicago and is the Chairman of LSC's Operations & Regulations Committee. We are very fortunate to have his wisdom as we set the policies that govern the LSC community. Herb Garten is a partner at Fedder & Garten in Baltimore and probably has logged more years as a national leader in the legal services community than the rest of us combined. He has been state bar president in Maryland, an IOLTA leader, and his background has been critical to helping the Board achieve an understanding of the issues that confront us. Florentino ("Lico") Subia is a client-eligible Board member who looks out for the interests of LSC's most important constituents: our clients. He and his wife come from El Paso, Texas, and are friends of the First Lady and President Bush, who made

a wise choice in selecting “Lico” to be the voice of our clients. Our other client-eligible Board member is Ernestine Watlington of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She and Maria Luisa Mercado, a lawyer in private practice in Galveston, Texas, round out the current LSC Board. These two women have gone above and beyond the call as leaders of the LSC, serving longer continuous terms than any Directors in the Corporation’s 30-year existence. They were appointed by President Clinton and continue to serve with distinction under President Bush. They’ve given us sound judgment and continuity, and we are fortunate they are part of our team. Finally, I recognize Bernice Phillips from Buffalo, New York, who is a client-eligible nominee to our Board.

The history of LSC and the broader national legal services community is, in a very real sense, a story of perseverance and triumph in the face of overwhelming challenges and overwhelming need. Listening to Justice

Johnson, Dean Ehrlich, Justice Dana, and LeVeeda Battle talk about the signature accomplishments of the equal justice movement in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s sheds what I think is a revealing light on the antecedents of LSC's current strengths.

When Bill McCalpin convinced Lewis Powell that the American Bar Association ought to put its considerable influence behind the creation of an OEO Legal Services Program in the 1960s, he laid the foundation for a critical relationship that endures today. The support of national, state, and local bar associations has not only helped save LSC during turbulent periods in our history, it has inspired a pro bono ethic within the legal profession that's critical if we are to reach more of the millions who rely on us for help when faced with a legal crisis.

As some of you know, it was a pro bono project in the mid-1980s that led to my involvement with LSC-funded

programs and, ultimately, LSC itself. Before my appointment to the LSC Board, I served on the local boards of the Georgia Legal Services Program and the Atlanta Legal Aid Society for many years. I took on those assignments after my eyes were opened to the incredibly important role that public interest lawyers and pro bono attorneys play in our justice system. Some of you perhaps have heard me tell this story, but I will never forget the day in 1985 that U.S. District Judge Marvin Shoob called me during my term as President of the Atlanta Bar Association to discuss an impending crisis facing our local justice system.

More than a thousand Cuban immigrants had been detained by the INS in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary after arriving on our shores in the Freedom Flotilla at President Carter's invitation. *Habeas* corpus petitions for the detainees had been granted by Judge Shoob but reversed on appeal, meaning Judge Shoob would have to dismiss more than

1,000 *habeas* petitions. He was understandably concerned because these detainees would have no access to legal representation. Judge Shoob asked if the Atlanta Bar Association could help. With assistance from the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, we mobilized more than 400 volunteer lawyers to represent about 800 of the Cubans in administrative parole hearings before the INS. I will always remember meeting with my Cuban clients at the federal prison with a translator. They were frightened and confused. Not only were they beyond access to our justice system, they were in a foreign country where they didn't speak the language or understand the issues confronting them. Imagine yourself in a similar situation. This experience had a profound effect on me. We helped show these new arrivals that our American democracy pays more than lip service to the idea of "justice for all."



Nearly 20 years later, I feel that one of our most important accomplishments of the new millennium has been the great progress we've made in enlisting new pro bono partners. In recent years, more large law firms and a growing number of major corporate legal departments have institutionalized pro bono volunteerism as a critical aspect of their corporate cultures. They have done so, in many cases, because the leaders sitting in this room have worked to nurture relationships with general counsels, law firm elders, and solo practitioners – convincing them that they have an important role to play.

Another sign of our success in the new millennium is the breadth of political support the LSC community enjoys today. Part of my job as Chairman is to meet periodically with members of Congress and their staffs to report on the work of LSC programs. This past spring, Helaine and I testified before the House of Representatives and came

away from two separate hearings convinced that bipartisan support for LSC is as strong as it has been in the Corporation's 30 years. Yesterday and today, Helaine and I had a series of productive meetings on Capitol Hill, where we were greeted warmly.

All of us in the leadership feel blessed to serve at a time when genuine bipartisanship surrounds federally funded legal services, and our elected leaders see our work as a critical component of the U.S. civil justice system. The genesis of that bipartisan feeling can be traced directly to the White House, where LSC's supporters include Attorney General nominee Al Gonzalez, newly designated White House Counsel Harriet Miers, and President Bush himself. If you will open your program, you will see that President Bush has sent you greetings, applauding – and this is a direct quote – “your commitment to upholding the fundamental

principles of opportunity and equal justice for all. Your efforts help make our country a more hopeful place.”

Three decades after Congress chartered the Legal Services Corporation, the work being done by the people in this room is being noticed and it is appreciated at the highest levels of the federal government. For that, we thank not only the executive directors and front-line lawyers who work for our grantees, but also the trailblazers who have led us to this historic moment. It is because of your commitment, your compassion, and your dedication that LSC’s future is as bright as its past.

On behalf of the LSC Board of Directors, thank you for all that you have done, and continue to do, to open wide the doors of justice in America. May our next 30 years be filled with as many successes as the last 30. It is an honor to be associated with all of you.